



May 27, 2014

KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-14-38

SUBJECT: LTP–Environmental Quality Incentives Program–Fiscal Year 2014 Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative

Action required by: June 20, 2014 (Field Offices [FOs])

Action required by: July 18, 2014 (Area Offices [AOs])

Action required by: June 6, 2014 (State Office [SO])

Purpose. To provide guidance for administering the fiscal year (FY) 2014 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) National Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative (NSHTI)

Expiration Date. September 30, 2015

This bulletin replaces Bulletin KS300-14-18. Action required by dates, contact information, and the distribution list have been updated.

Background

Through the NSHTI, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will assist producers to extend the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. The initiative has the potential to assist producers in addressing a resource concern by improving plant quality, improving soil quality, and reducing nutrient and pesticide transport.

The seasonal high tunnel practice is gaining recognition in many populated or urbanized areas. The NRCS must consider and support all producers who submit an application regardless of where their operation is located. It is important to note that general program eligibility is not limited based on zoning. There is a common misconception that areas zoned as “urban” or “residential” (or other similar zoning types) are not eligible based on the zoning classification.

However, while the applicant and land may meet program eligibility requirements, zoning may restrict a participant from installing certain conservation practices (CPs). Participants who carry out CPs are responsible for obtaining the authorities, rights, easements, permits, or other approvals necessary for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of the CPs in keeping with the applicable laws and regulations.

(more)

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FOs will accept applications on a continuous basis. All eligible applications will be ranked in the Programs Contracts System (ProTracts) Application, Evaluation, and Ranking Tool (AERT).

Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, and CPs

The eligible land uses, resource concerns, and conservation practices are available in Attachment 1.

Conservation Activity Plans are not offered as part of the NSHTI in FY2014.

Screening Criteria

No screening criteria is used to support this initiative.

ProTracts Ranking Tool

The ProTracts fund code for the NSHTI is “FY14 Seasonal High Tunnels.”

National ranking questions are consistent for all EQIP applications; however, only questions 2b, 2c, 5a, 5b, 7d, 7e, 7f, 9a, 9b, and 9c apply to the NSHTI. All other national questions shall be answered “No.” Refer to Bulletin KS300-14-16 for additional guidance on answering national questions.

A copy of the state and local ranking questions are provided in Attachment 2.

Deadlines

Although applications for EQIP are accepted continuously, there were two FY2014 application evaluation period cutoff dates for NSHTI applications: February 21, 2014, and April 18, 2014. Guidance for the second cutoff period will be forthcoming.

FOs completed conservation plans and application rankings on May 16, 2014.

AOs completed peer reviews of rankings on May 23, 2014.

The SO Programs Staff will make funding decisions by June 6, 2014.

FOs will have all approved applications and documentation entered in electronic contracts (eContracts) for second level review by June 20, 2014.

Assistant state conservationists for field operations will ensure that all contracts have been obligated in ProTracts by July 18, 2014.

Practice Clarification

As in previous years, the maximum CP extent for CP 798, Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops, eligible for financial assistance shall be 2,178 square feet per **agricultural operation** for the duration of the interim CP pilot which has been extended one year. This may be single or multiple structures for a maximum of 2,178 square feet coverage.

Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 502, Section 502.0, defines an agricultural operation as “. . . a parcel or parcels of land whether contiguous or noncontiguous, constituting a cohesive management unit for agricultural purposes.”

NOTE: When a participant with cropped land signs up for Irrigation System Micro-irrigation and does not have the required Division of Water Resources reports or Farm Service Agency records verifying that they have met the two out of the last five years irrigation requirement, they will need to provide the FO with adequate documentation of irrigation history. The supervisory district conservationist and district conservationist will use his/her best professional judgment and document their decision in the case file.

Contact: Please forward questions through established channels, to Chad G. Volkman, Resource Conservationist, at chad.volkman@ks.usda.gov or call (785)823-4568.

(Signed)

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State Conservationist

Attachments